DIRECT ADMISSION
FROM A BACHELOR’S DEGREE TO THE PHD PROGRAM

Rationale

The University of Texas School of Public Health (UTSPH) admits applicants with a prior bachelor’s degree (BS or BA) directly into its PhD degree program in Biostatistics, Environmental Sciences, and Epidemiology in order to ensure that the school stays competitive with other top schools of public health in the nation.

UTSPH currently offers the bachelor’s prepared applicant admission to the MS program with the “right to petition” for the PhD program. Petition to the PhD follows the completion of master’s equivalency (coursework) without the requirement for a thesis. Because the school can only admit BS or BA students to the MS degree program and not directly to the PhD program, it fails to attract some of the best applicants. Further, direct admission is attractive to those with advanced degrees, such as individuals with an MD or an MS in an unrelated field.

Direct admission to a PhD program is not a dramatic departure from the “right to petition”, where students who enter and complete the MS equivalency may apply to the PhD program without having to write a thesis. Direct admission, allows the student somewhat more flexibility than the current MS program, which among other things, requires a minor area of study before the student can enter the PhD program. In comparison, the PhD program requires two minor areas of study and obviates the need for the additional minor completed during an MS program. Students complete the same minimum number of credit hours in the direct admission as in the separate programs. However, the requirements for minor areas of study are essentially combined and constitute fewer credit hours for students admitted directly into the PhD program. This is of benefit to students in that more time and credit hours may be allocated to the major area of study.

General Description of PhD Program in Biostatistics, Environmental Sciences, and Epidemiology for “Direct Admission” Students

As in the current Ph.D. program in Public Health, “direct admission” graduates are expected to become independent investigators in the development and application of public health approaches to problems of human health and disease. Likewise, they are expected to assume senior positions in governmental or private health research agencies or to pursue careers in teaching and research.
Admission Requirements

“Direct admission” applicants should hold a BS or BA degree in a public health or related discipline from an accredited university. The admission criteria for these students is the same as the current criteria for the PhD program with the exception that a Master’s degree would no longer be required. In keeping with current admissions procedures, all applicants are judged on a number of factors, including but not limited to, the undergraduate Grade Point Average (GPA) and academic record, especially in science and mathematics courses, the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) score (for international students), academic letters of reference, the student's goal statement, and the work experience of the applicant, especially in public health organizations.

Duration of the program

UTSPH has instituted a limit of seven years for completing a Ph.D. degree. The “direct admission” Ph.D student is expected to complete the degree program within this time period.

Graduation Requirements

The “direct admission” students are required to complete a minimum of 72 semester credit hours of coursework, which is equivalent to 36 semester credit hours for a master’s degree plus 36 semester credit hours for the PhD degree.

Graduation requirements for the PhD program are listed below:

- Satisfactory completion of a prescribed course of study. For “direct admission” students, satisfactory completion of a minimum of 72 semester credit hours.
- Satisfactory performance on a qualifying examination deemed by the faculty of the Advisory Committee to test depth of knowledge in the major and two minor fields of concentration in the public health sciences, and a capacity to conceive and conduct independent research in the chosen field. Students will have completed at least 60 semester credit hours in preparation for the qualifying examination.
- Satisfactory completion of an original research dissertation, written in English, that makes a substantial contribution to knowledge in the public health sciences. All doctoral students must present their dissertation research in a public forum at the school prior to graduation. All completed dissertations will be made available to the public.

All courses taken by students count toward their degree, but no more than a total of 9 credit hours of the 72 credit hour minimum may be earned for dissertation research. Students must be enrolled during the semester in which they take the
qualifying examination. Students must also be enrolled in the semester in which the research proposal is submitted and continuously thereafter through the semester in which the degree requirements are completed. Students are required to satisfactorily complete a written comprehensive examination covering the major and each of two minor fields of study.

In the event that the “direct admission” student does not successfully complete the qualifying examination, the student’s advisory committee makes a recommendation to the members of the major area of study regarding the option of completing a thesis and receiving an MS degree. The final decision regarding the recommended course of action is arrived at by the Division Director and the Division faculty. Thus, the ability to complete an MS degree program in lieu of the PhD degree is not automatic.

PhD Competencies

“Direct admission” students are held to the same high standard as the master’s-prepared students. Graduates of the PhD program in Public Health are expected to be independent investigators in both the development and application of the major and minor areas of study to problems of human health and disease. Specific competencies have been developed for each major area of study. Major areas of study in the UTSPH reflect the multidisciplinary nature of Public Health.

Curriculum

“Direct admission” students to the PhD program are expected to acquire the same breadth and depth of knowledge and skills as the student entering the program with a master’s degree. The courses for the “direct admission” PhD student include all recommended courses for the MS program plus the recommended courses for the PhD program.